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# Truth in Art, and Erik Satie's Judgement

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Il est d'usage de croire qu'il y a une **Vérité** en Art. Je ne cesserai de le répéter – même à haute voix: «*Il n'y a pas de Vérité en Art.*» Soutenir le contraire n'est qu'un mensonge – & ce n'est pas beau de mentir ... C'est pour cela que je n'aime pas les *Pontifes*\*: ils sont par trop menteurs – de plus, je les crois un peu bêtes (si j'ose dire).

Erik Satie  
(*Pensée pour Fanfare*)

\* J'entends par Pontifes tous ces beaux messieurs qui «pontifient». On les reconnaît à leur air sérieux.<sup>1</sup>

It is certainly true that Satie, in his later years, did not tire of repeating that there is 'no Truth in Art'; and in saying so, he was doubtless very much in tune with the spirit of his artistic milieu, which included, after all, such aesthetic anarchists as Picabia and Tzara, as well as the great artistic revolutionaries of the time, Picasso and Stravinsky, for whom he had unbounded admiration. And every time he did so, he was careful to attribute the erroneous belief that there is a Truth in Art to that class of writers whom he variously called 'critiques', 'pédagogues', 'Pontifes', 'pions':<sup>2</sup> people of the serious persuasion, who think it is possible to teach or describe what makes a piece of art good or bad. Attacks against this tribe are, in fact, the staple of Satie's writings. It might appear sensible to infer from this that it would be foolish for a critic to look for Truth in Erik Satie's writings about art. Nonetheless, that is what I shall be doing in this article. I shall

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I am grateful to the AHRC for the Research Leave Award which has enabled me to pursue my research on Satie's writing.

<sup>1</sup> 'It is the done thing to believe that there is a **Truth** in Art. I shall not desist from repeating – even out loud – that: "*There is no Truth in Art.*" To maintain the contrary is but a lie – and it is not nice to tell lies ... That is why I do not like *Pontiffs*\*: they tell too many lies – and furthermore, I think they are a little stupid (if I may say so).

Erik Satie  
(A thought for *Fanfare*)

\* By Pontiffs, I mean all the fine gentlemen who 'pontificate'. They may be identified by their air of seriousness.'

Erik Satie, *Ecrits, réunis par Ornella Volta* (Paris: Editions Champ libre, 1981): 46. Many of the texts in Volta's invaluable collection of Satie's writings have been published in English translation, for example in: Erik Satie, *A Mammal's Notebook*, ed. Ornella Volta, trans. Antony Melville (London: Atlas Press, 1996); or *The Writings of Erik Satie*, ed. and trans. Nigel Wilkins (London: Eulenburg Books, 1980). However, there is no volume in English that includes all the texts I quote. I have therefore provided my own translations. All italics and bold within quotations are in the originals.

<sup>2</sup> More on this word in n. 19, below.

argue that, while there may, for Satie, be no truth in art, there are truths about art, susceptible of at least indirect expression, which Satie himself maintained with remarkable adroitness. Whether those truths are peculiar to the aesthetics of Satie's writings; whether they are relevant to the way we might appreciate his music; and whether they have echoes in the thought of his artistic companions (especially those mentioned above) – these are questions that will remain open; but I would like at least to suggest that they are worth asking.

It is so rare to find in Satie's public writings an argument of traditional, rational, positive form, maintained and repeated apparently without irony or antiphrasis, that one cannot but be struck by his echoing of one of the key concepts of late nineteenth-century aesthetics: that a historical study of music proves there is no unchanging definition, accessible to criticism or to pedagogy, of what music is. Satie uses this relativist argument in order to deny the right of critics to measure new music by old yardsticks. It can be found in almost all his writings about contemporary composers; and it becomes most insistent precisely when he is most concerned to assert that there is no Truth in Art. An example from an introduction he wrote for a concert of new music in Vienna in 1922:

Or – (et je ne saurais trop le répéter): ... il n'y a pas de Vérité en Art ... Vis-à-vis de Beethoven, ... Bach n'est pas la Vérité; ... vis-à-vis de Chopin ... Rameau n'est pas la Vérité ... L'Immortalité les a unis, ... fondus, ... associés ...

Tous sont dans la Vérité, ... au même titre, ... au même degré ...

... La Vérité???

Ils ont la leur ... la leur propre ... Ce qui n'est pas trop mal ... pas mal du tout.

En Art ... s'il y avait une Vérité ... Vérité Unique ... depuis longtemps, ... elle serait tellement fixée, ... qu'il serait impossible à l'artiste d'employer une autre technique, ... d'exprimer d'autres sensations, ... de traiter d'autres sujets que ceux monopolisés par cette Vérité ...<sup>3</sup>

But is Satie saying, here, that there is no Truth in Art, or that there are multiple truths? The bald statement 'il n'y a pas de Vérité en Art' seems to imply the former. However, the following lines suggest, rather, that each composer only seems not to be the truth when judged by criteria appropriate to other composers. Considered in himself (for all the composers Satie lists, here and in comparable contexts, are male), each composer does have a truth: his own truth; and each composer may be seen as 'dans la Vérité', provided that we are prepared to accept that the truth is not the same for each. Bach, then, is not the truth when faced

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<sup>3</sup> Satie, *Ecrits*, 96. 'But the fact is – (and I cannot repeat it too often): ... there is no Truth in Art ... Compared with Beethoven, ... Bach is not the Truth; ... compared with Chopin ... Rameau is not the Truth ... Immortality has united them ... blended them ... associated them ...

Each has attained the Truth, ... in the same sense, ... to the same degree ...

... The Truth???

They have their own ... each has his own ... Which isn't bad ... not bad at all.

In Art ... if there were a Truth ... a Single Truth ... it would have been so well established, ... for a long time now, ... that it would be impossible for an artist to use any technique, ... to express any sensations, ... to treat any subjects, ... other than those monopolized by this Truth ... '

with Beethoven; but doubtless he would be the truth when faced with Bach. The true moral of the music-history tale would be, not that there is no truth, but that there is no single truth, no 'Vérité Unique', applicable to all.

Satie's second article on Stravinsky begins with a very similar combination of elements. First, we have the affirmation that there is no 'Vérité en Art'. And then the generalizing 'Vérité' is replaced by 'Vérité unique' – leaving open the possibility of multiple truths; a possibility confirmed by the implication that each great composer has his own truth.

J'ai toujours dit – & je le répéterai encore très longtemps après ma mort – qu'il n'y a pas de Vérité en Art (de Vérité unique, s'entend).

La Vérité de Chopin – ce prodigieux créateur – n'est pas celle de Mozart, ce si luxueux musicien dont l'écriture est un éblouissement impérissable ...<sup>4</sup>

If each composer's truth is different, is there anything that they all have in common? Should the answer be 'no', then it might be feared that the very identity of music, its unity as a concept, would fall apart. That threat to the unity of art was at the heart of Dada; which was certainly part of its well-documented attraction for Satie.<sup>5</sup> And yet, in this article as always when discussing music he approves of, Satie sidesteps the threat, without confronting it, and almost surreptitiously restores the singularity, the unity of music, by attributing a distinguishing characteristic to all true composers; a characteristic which, by implication and association, attaches also to music itself, and becomes inseparable from all musical truths. It is timelessness; or immortality. That which unites Beethoven, Bach, Chopin and Rameau is 'l'Immortalité'; Mozart's writing will never cease to dazzle; and the conclusion of the second article on Stravinsky (from which I quote at the beginning of this article) similarly, if one reads between the lines, supposes the existence of a timeless canon of great musicians:

Je ne sais ce que je suis, mais ce que je sais, c'est que l'homme dont je viens de vous entretenir est un des plus grands musiciens qui aient jamais existé.

Que le nom de Strawinski soit acclamé! (65)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 61. 'I have always said – & shall continue to repeat it long, long after my death – that there is no Truth in Art (no single Truth, that is).

The Truth of Chopin – that prodigious creator – is not the Truth of Mozart, that luxurious musician whose writing dazzles unendingly ... '

<sup>5</sup> Michel Sanouillet's *Dada à Paris, édition nouvelle, revue, remaniée et augmentée par Anne Sanouillet* (Paris: CNRS, 2005) gives a balanced perspective on Satie's relationship to the historical Dada movement. He was central to its activities only for a short time, in the early months of 1922, when he presided with obvious glee over the meeting of Dadaists that effectively excommunicated Breton and his 'Congrès de Paris' (see n. 18 below). But his affinities with Dada were long lasting and profound. As Sanouillet says (ibid., 155), many of his pre-war writings, including *Le Piège de Méduse* (first performed in 1913 or early 1914, though not published until 1921, by the Editions de la Galerie Simon, in Paris), clearly belong to the pre-history of the Dada movement; and his last ballet, *Relâche*, just as clearly resuscitated in 1924 the spirit of Dada, after the movement's demise as an active force.

<sup>6</sup> 'I know not what I am, but what I do know is this: the man about whom I have been talking to you is one of the greatest musicians who has ever existed.

May the name of Stravinsky be acclaimed!'

So on the one hand, there is no unique truth in art. But on the other hand, we are, apparently, to believe that certain artists have a truth, and that this renders them and their art truly immortal – or rather (and the distinction is not unimportant), we are to believe that Erik Satie feels sure he knows that certain artists have a truth, and that this renders them and their art truly immortal. This apparent contradiction would place Satie firmly straddling the great fence that Dada helped to construct: the fence that separates idealist concepts of art from a modernity defined by its refusal of absolute values. My aim, in this article, is to show that this is indeed Satie's position, and that it is not as uncomfortable as it might appear; or that Satie, if I may be allowed to indulge in an adjustment and a mixing of the metaphor, is a virtuoso tightrope-walker along the top of the fence that Dada built.

What, for Satie, are the distinctive features of Stravinsky's truth? A critic's natural instinct, I think, would be to look in Satie's article, to see what 'sui generis' qualities he ascribes to Stravinsky. But the results of such an investigation are confusing. The implication that the great musician has his own personal truth is certainly accompanied by what might appear to be a description of the components of that truth:

Rien n'est livré au hasard, vous dis-je. Où a-t-il puisé sa somptueuse «Vérité»?

Voyez en lui un logicien remarquable, sûr & énergique; car il est le seul qui ait écrit avec une aussi magnifique puissance, une aussi certaine assurance, une aussi constante volonté.<sup>7</sup>

These are qualities fairly generally invoked, from the late Romantic period on, as characteristic of great artists of all kinds and periods. Would we be surprised to find Bach described as a remarkable logician? Or indeed Rameau, who, as Satie knew, applied logic to music with noteworthy persistence? And would it not have been perfectly acceptable to say that Beethoven wrote with magnificent power and constant strength of will? We will shortly see the adjective 'somptueuse' applied to a Beethoven symphony (his tenth). I think, furthermore, that it would be easy enough to imagine Satie saying similar things about Picasso. In short, these brief indications are too close to the general stereotype of the Great Artist to provide a real indication of the peculiar nature of Stravinsky's own personal and distinctive 'somptueuse «Vérité»'. Has Satie, then, rather than describing Stravinsky's truth, allowed himself to define the truth of art in general? But as we know, he refuses to allow the possibility of such a definition; and he certainly never asserts that he has provided one. In fact, Satie, here as in all his writings on musicians, carefully maintains a certain vagueness, simply by omitting to say what kind of truth he is talking about. The 'scare quotes' around the word 'Vérité' in the above quotation show that he knows he has got dangerously close to the critical point where he might have to commit himself; he quickly takes avoiding action.

Satie, in other words, cannot maintain for long that there is no truth of any sort in art. Almost as soon as he banishes the old-fashioned single unique truth

<sup>7</sup> Satie, *Ecrits*, 64. 'Nothing is left to chance, I tell you. Whence does he draw his sumptuous "Truth"?'

You should see in him a remarkable logician, precise and energetic; for he alone has written with such magnificent power, such 'unmistakeable' confidence, such constant strength of will.'

of art, he finds that a personal truth, unique to each artist, fills the vacuum. Unfortunately, personal truths in art have a distressing tendency to presuppose roots in an absolute truth ... to dodge this uncomfortable issue, Satie rapidly switches register. He ascribes all reflection on truth in art to the domain of criticism, which he rejects wholesale; and he confines himself to another order of truth, a merely descriptive order:

je dois vous annoncer loyalement que je ne me livrerai à aucune critique, me contentant de vous faire une sorte de description du splendide et féérique talent qui est déployé dans cet œuvre.<sup>8</sup>

This contrast between criticism and description, the former refused and the latter accepted by Satie, expresses a constant in his writing.

Criticism, to Satie, is a positive discourse. It is in harmony with the spirit of the scientific age so clearly formulated by Auguste Comte: 'le véritable esprit positif consiste surtout à *voir pour prévoir*, à étudier ce qui est, afin d'en conclure ce qui sera, d'après le dogme général de l'invariabilité des lois naturelles'<sup>9</sup> ('the true positive spirit consists above all in *seeing in order to foresee*, in studying what is, in order to conclude therefrom what will be, according to the general doctrine of the invariability of natural laws'). Criticism, to align itself with this dogma, seeks to establish invariable artistic laws, and to use them to prescribe what, in art, should happen next. Hence it becomes normative and prescriptive. Satie therefore rejects it energetically. Description, on the other hand, is acceptable to him because it implies no judgement, no prescription, and no reference to invariable laws. However, for that very reason, because it refuses to concern itself with invariable laws, Satie's description is of no help at all in understanding rationally why some composers are immortal, why some have a truth while others do not. It suggests but refuses to address the question of whether truths in art are personal or universal. And this is not an inadequacy or omission in Satie's discourse. On the contrary: it is a point on which he takes a principled stand. Satie's principle is that the question of whether truths in art are personal or universal must not be addressed positively.

I think it is possible to maintain, taking the long perspective, that the only proper end of writing about music, for Satie, is to persuade us that we actually believe in personal yet immortal musical truths. This belief is irrational, and cannot be supported by critical analysis of the truths concerned. It appears to conflict with Satie's principle that we should not believe in a unique truth. It also conflicts, more directly, with the dominant ideological trends of his (and perhaps our) time; not only the scientific, but also, as we shall see, the anti-idealistic. Satie's unique and extraordinary writing style is designed to profit from those conflicts: to allow science, anti-idealism and the refusal of unique truth their positive due, to give them victory in the field of the rational, precisely so that he can make plain the boundaries of that field, and suggest the existence of another, inaccessible to the positive; a second field where an irrational faith in the artist's personal immortal truth can survive.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 63. 'I shall frankly confess to you that I will engage in no critical activity; I will merely give you a sort of description of the splendid, the enchanting talent which unfolds in these works.'

<sup>9</sup> Auguste Comte, *Discours sur l'esprit positif* (Paris: Vrin, 1995): 74. The work was first published in 1844.



Satie's articles on Stravinsky, together with his essay on Debussy and his various introductions to concerts of music by his friends, belong to a distinctive genre in his writing. In these texts, he is speaking in support of composers he respected; and he does so apparently without irony (irony, in these circumstances, being reserved for the tribe of critics). Elsewhere, however, when he is not defending his fellows, his style usually appears constantly ironical. One senses that there are many layers to the irony; but it is not initially obvious how many layers there are, or what Satie's own opinion (if any) might be. One fine example of this is his magnificent 'Eloge des Critiques' ('In Praise of Critics') (77–80). Another is 'Parfait Entourage' ('Ideal Companions'), which begins thus:

Vivre au centre d'œuvres glorieuses de l'Art est une des plus grandes joies qui se puissent ressentir. Parmi les précieux monuments de la pensée humaine que la modestie de ma fortune m'a fait choisir pour partager ma vie, je parlerai d'un magnifique faux Rembrandt, profond et large d'exécution, si bon à presser du bout des yeux, comme un fruit gras, trop vert.<sup>10</sup>

Can we take seriously Satie's praise of a forgery? The peculiar analogy between the painting and a perhaps underripe yet visually attractive fruit might suggest a negative answer ... but perhaps, at least before we pause to think too much about that analogy, we might have hoped that we could. After all, could it not be possible that a forger or an anonymous painter might have produced a masterpiece? in which case, might Satie not be mocking those who think that the signature and price-tag are what determine the value of a painting? But our faith in this argument fades as, going through the list of his apocryphal possessions, Satie turns to his favourite:

un faux manuscrit de Beethoven – sublime symphonie apocryphe du maître – acheté pieusement par moi, il y a dix ans, je crois.

Des œuvres du grandiose musicien, cette 10<sup>e</sup> symphonie, encore ignorée, est une des plus somptueuses. Les proportions en sont vastes comme un palais; les idées en sont ombreuses et fraîches; les développements en sont précis et justes.

Il fallait que cette symphonie existât: le nombre 9 ne saurait être beethovenien. Il aimait le système décimal: «J'ai dix doigts», expliquait-il.<sup>11</sup>

To find this unbelievable, ridiculous, we do not need to wait for the strange analogies and the mock justifications.

We can accept that a painting well executed in Rembrandt's style might look, even to an expert, like a genuine Rembrandt; but anyone who thinks they have an ear for such things cannot believe that a symphony in Beethoven's late style

<sup>10</sup> Satie, *Ecrits*, 20. 'To live surrounded by Art's glorious works is one of the greatest joys that can be felt. Amongst the precious monuments of human thought that the modesty of my means has led me to choose as my life's companions, I shall mention a magnificent false Rembrandt, profound and of sweeping execution, so delicious when squeezed with the tips of one's eyes, like some rich fruit, too green.'

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 'A false Beethoven manuscript – a sublime apocryphal symphony by the master – piously purchased by me, ten years ago, I believe.'

Of the grandiose musician's works, this tenth symphony, which remains unknown, is one of the most sumptuous. Its proportions are as vast as those of a palace; its ideas are cool and shady; its developments are precise, judicious, exact.

This symphony had to exist; the number 9 could not be Beethovenian. He liked the decimal system: "I have ten fingers", he would explain.'



could fool us for a moment. In 1996, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York held an exhibition entitled 'Rembrandt / Not Rembrandt', showing the paintings in its considerable collection that were by Rembrandt according to some experts, and not by Rembrandt according to others; these paintings outnumbered those Rembrandts whose attribution remained uncontested. One certainly cannot imagine anything comparable happening with the symphonies of Beethoven. The strength of our belief in the ineffably unique and utterly unmistakeable quality of Beethoven (especially late Beethoven) can be gauged by the presentation of Barry Cooper's realization of sketches by Beethoven as part of, precisely, a tenth symphony. The universal consensus among musicologists was that no such realization could ever really sound like Beethoven. In defending his work, Cooper maintained that it was pretty well indistinguishable analytically from Beethoven; but he accepted that it nonetheless obviously lacked a certain quality that, precisely, escapes analysis.<sup>12</sup> In short, just as in Satie's day, Beethoven's *je ne sais quoi* was held to be as instantly recognizable as it was indefinable. The first of Satie's prized forgeries, then, is attributed to the most imitated of painters, the second to the composer deemed most inimitable; and this enables Satie's irony to strike at the very heart of the our beliefs concerning imitation.

As always, the key to understanding that irony is an appreciation of the strategy that Ornella Volta, following Vladimir Jankélévitch, calls 'conformisme ironique' ('ironic conformism') (269).<sup>13</sup> Satie imitates the discourse of the pontificator, he apes seriousness, but always with a twist that throws into relief an irrational presupposition of the pontificating discourse. The critic thinks of himself as the purveyor of a serious truth; Satie's irony shows that this seriousness is based on shaky foundations, for when we think about the reasons for which Satie's proclamations are clearly ridiculous, we find that those same reasons and that same ridicule can be applied to the affirmations of the critic. In the process, Satie contests the status of the rational, of the serious and of the truth, in judging artistic productions. Analysis of Satie's irony, therefore, must aim to pinpoint the irrational aspect of serious discourse that Satie highlights as he apes it. In this case, it is nothing more nor less than the supposition that there is a true, inimitable, and self-identical Beethovenian voice. Satie rubs our noses in the fact that we believe such a voice exists; if we did not, why would we find his appreciation of the tenth symphony so ludicrous? And yet at the same time, by starting from the less clear-cut case of Rembrandt, he reminds us that this conviction is, rationally speaking, questionable. What, and where, exactly, is the Beethovenian truth? Is it

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the frank exchange of views between Cooper and his critic Robert S. Winter in 'Correspondence: Beethoven's Tenth Symphony', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 117/2 (1992): 324–30. 'No doubt', writes Cooper of his realization and completion, 'it is a distorted view of Beethoven's intentions' (328). Hence, doubtless: 'A major question is whether the reconstruction actually sounds at all like Beethoven' (326). To that question, Cooper does not presume to give an answer. But he does maintain that musicological analysis has generally failed to pinpoint the differences between his work and Beethoven's. 'Some critics have made the unsurprising claim that it is not as good; but their attempts to identify specific faults have been largely unsuccessful' (326).

<sup>13</sup> Volta explains the concept more fully in: Erik Satie, *Correspondance presque complète* (Paris: Fayard/IMEC, 2003): 10. 'Conformisme ironique' is the title of a chapter in Jankélévitch's book *L'Ironie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1964): 119–34, in which Jankélévitch writes, commenting on Satie's *Socrate*: 'L'ironie, nature composée, s'installe dans l'erreur, non pas pour la comprendre, mais pour la perdre' (126–7) ('Irony, whose nature is composite, aligns itself with error, not in order to understand it, but in order to lead it to its downfall').

simply to be equated with everything that Beethoven wrote? What if he had off days? would that mean that some of his work was less true to himself than the rest? but who would have the right to judge, to say what is truly Beethovenian? can we really afford to allow anyone to define the Beethovenian essence in a way that could be used as a serious critical (and diacritical) tool? Satie, in his usual manner (as inimitable as Beethoven's), makes us uncomfortably aware of such difficulties by ignoring them too flagrantly. Not everyone, he admits, may find the apocryphal tenth symphony as obviously impressive as Beethoven's other symphonies. But he refuses to take this as proof that the tenth symphony does not contain the true Beethovenian essence.

Venus pour absorber filialement ce chef-d'œuvre, de leurs oreilles méditatives et recueillies, quelques-uns, sans raison, crurent à une conception inférieure de Beethoven, et le dirent. Ils allèrent plus loin même.

Beethoven ne peut être inférieur à lui-même, dans aucun cas. Sa technique et sa forme restent augurales, même dans l'infime. Le rudimentaire ne lui est applicable. Il ne s'intimide pas du contrefait imputé à sa personne artistique.<sup>14</sup>

This argument is so utterly irrational on the surface that it would be otiose for me to point out how. And yet if we are brave enough to allow ourselves to think about it, we might begin to suspect that it is no more irrational than the general supposition that Beethoven's style is unmistakable. Is it actually possible to determine, on internal musical grounds, with positive scientific certitude, which music is by him, and which is not? If it were, would that not mean we had found the Beethovenian recipe, and could therefore produce more Beethovenian music? In which case, we would no longer be able to determine, on internal musical grounds, which music is actually by Ludwig van Beethoven himself – or to put it another way: either the distinguishing features of Beethoven's unique voice are susceptible of positive analysis, in which case they can be reproduced, and his voice ceases to be unique; or they are not susceptible to positive analysis, in which case it is impossible to demonstrate scientifically that an apocryphal work is not worth a work that is truly by him.

Of these two alternatives, Satie chooses the second, unfailingly and unambiguously. There is no possibility of analysing critically the unique voice, the individual composer's personal truth; it is beyond the positive. It follows that if we believe that the unique voice, the personal truth, exists, our belief must be irrational. What distinguishes Satie from the critic is not that the former's beliefs are rational and the latter's irrational; both are irrational. It is that the critics take their beliefs as seriously as if they were rational, as if they were positive, and therefore gave them the right to be prescriptive; whereas Satie accepts that his beliefs cannot be positively justified, and allows the consequences of that irrationality to invade his writing. The first and most pervasive of those consequences is this: for Satie, judgement on all such matters must be arbitrary in form; it should be clear that it cannot be rationally justified, but can only depend on an unjustified faith.

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<sup>14</sup> Satie, *Ecrits*, 20. 'Of those who came filially to absorb this masterpiece, through their meditative and contemplative ears, some, without justification, thought it an inferior conception of Beethoven, and said so. They went still further.

Beethoven cannot be inferior to himself, in any circumstances. His technique and his form remain augural, even at the most minute scale. The rudimentary cannot apply to him. He is not to be intimidated by the counterfeit imputed to his artistic person.'

Justified faith is the victim of the most sustained exercise in 'conformisme ironique' in the Satie corpus: the proclamations of the 'Eglise Métropolitaine d'Art de Jésus Conducteur' ('Metropolitan Church of Art of Jesus Conductor'), or EMAJC for short. The normal register of its writings is that of the fulmination, the excommunication, the rant, always from a point of view of absolute authority, assumed to be incontestable, in the name of the Christian Church in general. This is plainly ridiculous simply because Satie had no such authority. I have said that analysis of Satie's irony should aim to pinpoint the irrational aspect of serious discourse that Satie highlights as he apes it: the aspect of serious discourse that Satie apes here is simply the assumption of authority; in the first place by Joséphin Péladan and his esoteric *fin-de-siècle* ilk, but more widely by all churches.<sup>15</sup> There is in fact not one unique church, just as there is no unique Truth in Art; so the claim of any church to universal authority is a perfect prey for Satie's irony.

The 'Cartulaire', which was the official organ of the EMAJC, published in June 1895 an 'Oraison pour les Bons et contre les Méchants: *athées, impies, libertins, orgueilleux, juifs déicides, hérétiques anglicans, francs-maçons simoniaques, et autres*' (121) ('Prayer for the Good and against the Evil: *atheists, the impious, libertines, the proud, deicidal Jews, heretical Anglicans, simoniacal freemasons, and others*'). This list of the Evil corresponds reasonably closely (allowing for the parodic mode) to the usual targets of the increasingly virulent right-wing Catholic propaganda of the time – with one exception: rather than Protestants in general, Satie here specifies Anglicans. Why? I will allow myself to suggest a biographical explanation. Satie's mother, Jean Leslie Anton, was an Anglican; and so was Satie himself – for six years. His mother had him baptized into the Anglican church. She died, however, in 1872; and his paternal grandparents, who had never approved of Jean Anton or of her religion and did not want a Protestant living in their house, quickly had little Eric rebaptized a Catholic. The 'méchants', therefore, would include Satie's mother. Yet the 'Oraison' condemns her and her fellow Anglicans to burn at the stake:

Nous frapperons Vos Ennemis et Nous les étendrons à terre. Nous tarirons la source de leur rage, nous exterminerons leurs œuvres réprouvées; nous élèverons pour eux les bûchers de la Sainte-Inquisition, et leurs corps hideux se tordront dans la douleur, pour la meilleure purification de leurs âmes. Nous vous offrirons un holocauste, Seigneur, et la fumée vous en sera agréable.<sup>16</sup>

Should we be disturbed to find Satie stoking up for his mother the bonfires of the Inquisition? Not if we bear in mind the ironic nature of the entire EMAJC enterprise. In fact, Satie's target, here, is not his mother, but the very discourse of condemnation. As ever, he attacks it by imitating its rationale, and pushing it

<sup>15</sup> Steven Moore Whiting, in *Satie the Bohemian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), shows how Péladan's Rosicrucian sect was born and died in a milieu saturated with self-satire, where faith and hoax were never far apart. The context in which Whiting places Satie's ironic style (its first spiritual home being the 'Chat noir' cabaret) makes it clear that to interpret the EMAJC as an ironic or satirical enterprise is entirely historically appropriate – provided one bears in mind that such satire, at the time, by no means meant straightforward rejection of the faith being satirized.

<sup>16</sup> Satie, *Ecrits*, 122. 'We will strike Your Enemies and We will lay them prostrate on the ground. We will dry up the well-spring of their madness, we will exterminate their reprobate works; we will raise up for them the fires of the Holy Inquisition, and their hideous bodies will writhe in pain, for the better purification of their souls. We will offer up to you a holocaust, Lord, and its smoke will be agreeable to you.'

too far. In his assertion of absolute authority, he invites scepticism; he is, in effect, opening himself to mockery. (As expected, the 'Cartulaire' attracted plenty of mockery and made no converts; in this as in so many other ways, Satie was indeed a dadaist 'avant la lettre'.) His aim is to do this in such a way that the scepticism should attach itself not only to him personally, but also to those who speak like him.

It was this ironic assumption of the discourse of authoritative condemnation, in his role as *Parcier* of the EMAJC, that founded Satie's discourse on art. He published nothing on any artistic topic before his EMAJC period, which dates from 1893 to 1895.<sup>17</sup> After that, he had found his voice, and he never lost it again. What the EMAJC taught him was to produce a discourse that proclaimed, through attacks on outsiders, an unfounded authority. And the proclamation of unfounded authority remained, ever afterwards, the fundamental principle of Satie's writings on all forms of art. Satie writes as a naked Emperor who points to his nakedness.

Before I go any further, I should make it clear that I am not suggesting Satie believed in neither art, nor religion. On the contrary. His scepticism is directed not at them, but at the 'pontifes' who would persuade us that they can demonstrate their authority in matters of art and religion. Satie's unwavering conviction, in both spheres, was that their true value could and should only be affirmed, never demonstrated; and that his duty as a writer was double: to defend good art; and at the same time, to deny that he was being rational in doing so. In fulfilling this duty, he had to counter the bourgeois positivist philosophy of the critics by demonstrating, through 'conformisme ironique', that their aesthetic arguments were in fact as arbitrary as his own. However, in his later years, he also found himself obliged to steer around another reef, more dangerous because closer to home: anti-idealism.

In one sense, Dada marked an absolutely decisive moment in the history of discourse on aesthetics. Its founding principle was close to Satie's: that all assertions of aesthetic authority were arbitrary. Dada, or more precisely Tristan Tzara, whom Satie knew and liked, would certainly have agreed with Satie that there is no Truth in Art; that it is ridiculous to try to say anything rational about what Art in general is; and that publicly inviting such ridicule was a positive service to the cause of Art, to the extent that the ridicule rubbed off, not only on the Dadaist, but also on all serious or positive notions of Art. In the confrontations between Tzara, whose refusal of serious doctrines was staunch, and Breton, who seemed to Satie dangerously close to seriousness as he headed towards surrealism, Satie always sided with Tzara.<sup>18</sup> And to the extent that a

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<sup>17</sup> In Satie's *Ecrits* as published by Ornella Volta, the only publications chronologically preceding the EMAJC are those that appeared in *La Lanterne japonaise* in 1888 and 1889, normally over the signature 'Virginie Lebeau'. They are comic writings, typical of the 'Chat Noir' style described by Steven Moore Whiting (see n. 15, above). Not a single composer is mentioned in them – except for one Erik Satie, who figures in two of the articles, as a 'rude lapin' (which one might roughly translate as 'valorous gentleman') and composer of *Gymnopédies*, the third of which, apparently, cured 'Femme Lengrenage, Journalière à Précigny-les-Balayettes' ('Mistress Cogworks, Employed as a Daily at Foresign-under-Shortbrush') of a nasal polyp (113).

<sup>18</sup> The famous open letter dated 13 February 1922 to *Comœdia*, signed by Eluard, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Satie, and Tzara, condemning Breton's apparent attempt to control the Dada movement, uses a revealing ecclesiastical analogy: 'nous pensons qu'il est temps

modern consensus on these matters exists, I think we can say that Tzara has triumphed over Breton. We do not believe today, generally, that there is any point pursuing a general truth about what art is, even a surrealist one. Up to that point, I imagine that Satie would have been happy with his friend Tzara's legacy. However, there is another point, equally essential, on which their aesthetics diverge; and it concerns not whether or not faith in art can be justified rationally (they agree that it cannot), but whether it is necessary.

Parmi les musiciens, il y a les pions & les poètes. Les premiers en imposent au public & à la critique. Je citerai comme exemples de poètes Liszt, Chopin, Schubert, Moussorgsky; de pion,<sup>19</sup> Rimsky-Korsakow. Debussy était le type du musicien poète. On trouve dans sa suite plusieurs types de musicien pions. (D'Indy, qui pourtant professe, n'en est pas un.)

Le métier de Mozart est léger, celui de Beethoven lourd, ce que peu de gens peuvent comprendre; mais tous deux sont des poètes. Tout est là.<sup>20</sup>

It is indeed. This declaration is entirely contrary to the spirit of Dada (which was in the process of asserting itself in Paris as Satie published this article, in 1920) in one essential: Satie is clearly affirming that certain composers are genuinely artistic, and others are not; as if this were a timeless truth. He uses the same technique as Berlioz or Debussy to define 'good' musicians: analogy with poetry – a great musician is a poet. And to define 'bad' musicians, he assimilates them to 'pions', in other words to the tribe of those who think that music can be controlled. To emphasize the point, he expresses implicit astonishment that a teacher (Vincent d'Indy, who officiated at the Schola Cantorum, where Satie himself had been a student) should nonetheless turn out not to be a 'pion'. This is entirely in accordance with all the other articles that Satie published in which he mentions contemporary musicians. He never changes his mind or contradicts himself on this point.

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de mettre fin à ces histoires de papes, et de défendre notre liberté' ('we think that it is time to put an end to these papal manoeuvrings, and to defend our freedom') (*Correspondance presque complète*, 474).

<sup>19</sup> The word 'pion' is central to Satie's discourse on music. It contains two opposing meanings. The primary sense one might render as something like 'Surveillance Officer': it properly designates someone (usually a student) employed in French schools, not to teach, but merely to keep order and to discipline pupils, in the playground and during study periods. 'Pion', however, also means a pawn, both on the chess-board and as someone manipulated by others. (Indeed, the 'pion' in school, while traditionally detested by pupils as a figure of authority, is also seen as someone of low status, at the bottom of the professional hierarchy.) A 'pion', then, is someone either controlled or controlling; and that very ambiguity focuses attention, not on what the 'pion' does, but on the fact that for him, control is what counts. Unable to find an English word that contains this dual meaning, I have kept the French word in the translation.

<sup>20</sup> Satie, *Ecrits*, 45. 'One can divide musicians into "pions" & poets. The former hoodwink the public & critics. Some examples of poets: Liszt, Chopin, Schubert, Moussorgsky. Rimsky-Korsakov is an example of a "pion". Debussy was the type of the poet musician. Among his followers are to be found several types of the "pion" musician. (D'Indy, even though he teaches, is not one.)

Mozart's musical language is light, Beethoven's is heavy (not many people are able to understand this); but both are poets. Which is all that matters.'

Satie's list of 'good' musicians is exclusive. No one ever moves from the 'bad' category to the 'good'. And on the rare occasions when musicians move from the 'good' to the 'bad', it is never because Satie revises his opinion of the works he had appreciated; it is always (or so he would have us believe) because, having been corrupted by the 'pion' mentality, certain composers stopped composing the 'good' music of which they might have been capable, and started writing 'bad' music.<sup>21</sup> It follows that no dead composer can ever change category. Hence Satie can affirm that the 'good' musicians of the past are, for him, immortal. But for any good Dadaist, such notions of immortality, of essential poetic quality, are as much to be attacked as the concept of artistic truth in general.

One can gauge the distance between Satie and the true spirit of Dada by comparing their attitudes to the assimilation of art to mass production. For Dada, this assimilation is part of a general assault on all humbug, and a necessary corrective to the idealization of art. But for Satie, it was anathema:

Simple Question

Que préférez-vous:

La Musique ou la Charcuterie?

C'est une question, semble-t-il, qui devrait se poser au moment des hors-d'œuvre.

Dans beaucoup de lieux, l'excellent et doux silence a été remplacé par de la mauvaise musique. Il est bien vu, par le commun, d'ouïr de fausses belles choses, d'écouter de sottes ritournelles, vaguement pieuses, en prenant un bock ou en essayant un pantalon ...

Ouf! Tout cela est bien pénible pour un homme de mon âge; & j'étouffe de cette dufayélisation musicale.

Le remède? De formidables impôts; de terribles vexations; de sévères répressions. Des supplices, même.

A-t-on le droit d'enlaidir froidement notre pauvre vie?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The clearest example is Georges Auric. In April 1921, Satie wrote an introduction to a concert of music by 'les Six' in which he names Auric, along with Poulenc and Milhaud, as representative of the latest musical tendencies, and describes himself as their friend. Unfortunately, three years later, Satie caught Auric (as well as Poulenc and Cocteau) hobnobbing in Monte Carlo with Louis Laloy, whom Satie had long detested as the most perniciously serious of music critics. Satie broke with Auric, Poulenc and Cocteau, and published more than one article in which he made plain his contempt. Auric mocked Satie mercilessly in return (although, as he recounts in his autobiography *Quand j'étais là* (Paris: Grasset, 1979): 21–33, he later repented). At the same time – was it a consequence, a cause, or a coincidence? – Auric's music ceased to please Satie.

<sup>22</sup> Satie, *Ecrits*, 24–5.

'Simple Question

Which would you prefer:

Music or Sausages?

This is a question, I think, that should be asked as the hors d'œuvre is brought. In many establishments, silence, sweet and excellent silence, has been replaced by bad music. It has become fashionable, among the vulgar, to hear false fine sounds, to listen to foolish refrains, vaguely pious, as one quaffs a pint or tries on a pair of trousers ...

Sigh! all this is most distressing for a man of my age; & I am being suffocated by this musical dufayélisation.

The cure? Formidable taxes; terrible vexations; severe repression. Torture, even.

Have they the right coldly to suffuse with ugliness our poor life?



Ornella Volta, in a characteristically informative and perceptive note, explains the neologism 'dufayélisation' – and shows how it distances Satie from the painterly avant garde:

le Palais de la Nouveauté Dufayël est le plus connu des grands magasins de l'époque. En tant que synonyme de production de série, il va servir inopinément de drapeau à tout artiste que aspire à briser l'ivoire de sa tour. Chez les cubistes, à la question «Veux-tu peindre comme le Louvre ou comme Dufayël?», la réponse de rigueur est «comme Dufayël, évidemment». – «Dufayël me semble plus intéressant que Ribemont-Dessaignes», déclare Picabia, qui pourtant aime bien ce dernier ... il faut bien dire qu'aucun de ces propos ne conviendrait à ES. C'est précisément pour échapper à la «dufayélisation» musicale qu'il a essayé de limiter celle-ci à la «musique d'ameublement».<sup>23</sup>

The choice between music and 'charcuterie', like the contrast between furniture music and art music (or true music, or serious music), would have appeared very old-fashioned, indeed positively Romantic (or worse still, Symbolist) to any good Dadaist. It suggests belief in an essential difference between the beauty of true music, and the ugliness of false music, which is invading our lives; precisely the kind of essentialism that Dada was designed to destroy. And yet Satie generally managed to stay on the best of terms with Picabia (as well as with Picasso), and indeed Tzara and Ribemont-Dessaignes. Indeed, his happiest artistic collaborations were with Picasso and Picabia. This is not as bizarre as it might seem. Satie, as well as maintaining his old-fashioned belief in the immortality of music, beauty and great musicians, tirelessly, brilliantly, and to the applause of the spirit of Dada, demonstrated the ridiculousness of his own faith.

In his revolt against the assimilation of music to 'charcuterie', Satie proposes, as we have seen, a cure for those who have offended his aesthetic sensibility:

De formidables impôts; de terribles vexations; de sévères répressions. Des supplices, même.<sup>24</sup>

Vexations? Satie was himself the author of the most terrible musical vexation of all time. *Vexations* is a little one-minute piece that, on the manuscript, is accompanied by the following celebrated note:

Pour se jouer 840 fois de suite ce motif, il sera bon de se préparer au préalable, et dans le plus grand silence, par des immobilités sérieuses<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 243. 'the Dufayël Palace of Novelty was the most famous department store of the time. Being a synonym for mass production, it was pressed into service as a rallying-point for any artist who sought to shatter the ivory of his tower. For a cubist, to the question "Would you like your painting to be as in the Louvre or as in Dufayël?", the correct answer was "As in Dufayël, obviously." – "Dufayël seems to me more interesting than Ribemont-Dessaignes", declared Picabia, much though he liked the latter ... it must be said that such comments would not have suited ES. It was precisely in order to escape from musical "dufayélisation" that he sought to limit it to "furniture music".

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 24–5. 'Formidable taxes; terrible vexations; severe repression. Torture, even.'

<sup>25</sup> 'To play this motif to oneself 840 times in a row, it will be appropriate to prepare oneself beforehand, in the most profound silence, by serious immobilities'; see Robert Orledge's exemplary article 'Understanding Satie's "Vexations"', *Music and Letters* 79 (Aug. 1998): 386–95, 387. The note, like the piece, was published posthumously.



The abundant literature on this injunction is summed up in intriguing articles by Robert Orledge and Stephen Whittington.<sup>26</sup> Opinion is divided on the effect and aesthetic implications of playing the piece 840 times (which takes between 12 and 24 hours). Whittington suggests that it is, amongst other things, a study in musical boredom. He portrays it as a forerunner of the 'musique d'ameublement' to which Ornella Volta refers in the note quoted above: the 'furniture music', which Satie wrote more than two decades later, and which is similarly repetitive (though Satie did not specify the number of repetitions). However, as Whittington also acknowledges, despite the similarities, a distinction remains to be made between furniture music and *Vexations*. 'Musique d'ameublement' was, as Volta says, quite explicitly anti-art; it was music reduced to the level, precisely, of the department store, of the sausage-machine, to be churned out endlessly and not to be listened to; in short, it is music 'as in Dufayêl', and, to the artist, either irritating or comic. But in a strange way, in the end, *Vexations* is different:

Vexations is structured and notated to facilitate the cultivation and maintenance [sic] a mental state which Satie calls 'serious immobility'. This is the view of John Cage, who observed that 'the textual remarks in connection with the Vexations are not humorous; they are in the spirit of Zen Buddhism.'<sup>27</sup>

Robert Orledge has shown by careful musical analysis why *Vexations* is peculiarly well-adapted to this function, showing that the piece is actually designed to be unmemorable (so that even after playing it repeatedly, although it is so short, pianists still need the music in front of them), at the same time as being highly musically structured.<sup>28</sup>

Whittington continues:

The act of performing or listening to a complete performance of *Vexations* cannot be compared to any other musical experience. In Cage's famous aphorism, 'In Zen they say: If something is boring after two minutes, try it for four. If still boring, try it for eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and so on. Eventually one discovers that it's not boring at all but very interesting.' In a poetic<sup>29</sup> sense, *Vexations* never finishes – the 840 repetitions are themselves but an instant in the eternal present in which the music exists like some Platonic form, obliterating memory, eluding analysis. In the words of an ancient Indian saying, 'The music continues; it is we who walk away.'<sup>30</sup>

Cage's aphorism obfuscates an essential question. Could the extraordinary effect of *Vexations* be produced by the 840-fold repetition of absolutely anything boring? Or is the effect because of the peculiar and unique character of Erik Satie's composition *Vexations*? Whittington's own assertion that it 'is structured and notated to facilitate the cultivation and maintenance' of a certain mental state surely suggests the latter, as does Orledge's analysis. To put this question

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Whittington, 'Serious Immobilities: On the Centenary of Erik Satie's *Vexations*', in *Erik Satie: Compositeur de Musique* (1999), [www.af.lu.se/~fogwall/article3.html](http://www.af.lu.se/~fogwall/article3.html), accessed 8 May 2009. Whittington's article, as far as I know, is available only on this website.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Orledge, 'Satie's "Vexations"'.

<sup>29</sup> Whittington ('Serious Immobilities') here takes up Satie's identification of the truly musical with the poetic. Perhaps no critical trope has been more contagious over the past two centuries than the definition of poetry as musical, and of music as poetic; it allows one to define neither.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

in perspective, it is worth comparing Satie's work with the two pieces of musical Dadaism that Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes describes.<sup>31</sup> One, 'Pas de la chicorée frisée' ('Dance of the Curly Endive'), was composed by Ribemont-Dessaignes, for piano, by choosing notes and harmonies entirely at random. Performed at a 'soirée Dada' on 27 March 1920, it predictably provoked scandalized howls, whistles, and so on. The title doubtless owes something to the titles of Satie's piano pieces, and Satie's *Parade* had successfully provoked a comparable scandal, on a larger scale, three years earlier. Yet the essential difference remains: *Parade*, like the piano pieces, like *Vexations*, is very clearly not composed at random. Two months later, at a 'festival Dada' in the Salle Gaveau, a performance was given on the great pipe organ of 'Le Pélican, un fox-trot à la mode, ce qui prenait figure de sarcasme' ('*The Pelican*, a fashionable foxtrot; this was taken as a sarcasm').<sup>32</sup> Satie was known for using fashionable dances in his music, including rags and tangos, and for quoting other people's music; but once again, the difference is essential. Musical Dada refuses the act of deliberate musical composition, and contests it either through randomness, or through simple plagiarism. But Satie, though randomness and plagiarism have their place in his work, as part of the parodic refusal of Unique Truth in Art that allied him with Dada, also, deliberately, musically, composes with or around them.

To return to the torments that Satie (briefly resurrecting the thundering voice of the Parcier of the EMAJC) proposed to inflict on the Philistines who treat music like sausages: let us remember that these vexations are described not as a punishment, but as a cure, a 'remède'. If we allow ourselves to imagine *Vexations* as the materialization of this cure, then we might say that it consists of listening to music that would be almost the same as sausage music or furniture music – almost, but not quite; for as well as becoming, in time, tediously repetitive, it might, if we give it the credit of our attention, make us suspect the possibility of composing something that could take us out of time and, in the process, put us in mind of the one unchanging truth about music that Satie allows his words to express: its immortality.

As Whittington says:

It is typical of Satie that the very words that make *Vexations* one of his most radical works also cast doubt on the seriousness of the piece. One cannot parody *Vexations*: it is so bizarre that it is already a parody of itself. Parody is characteristic of Satie's work, and self-parody in particular. It goes beyond a self-mocking expression of Satie's characteristic modesty and is elevated to an artistic method. Satie's

<sup>31</sup> Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Déjà jadis, ou Du mouvement Dada à l'espace abstrait* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973); see 100–106. This book, originally published in 1958, contains, as well as a fine pen-portrait of Satie in the days of Dada (156–7), a post-Dada musical aesthetic, in which one finds intact the fundamental principle of 'pure music' as it had been formulated a century earlier: 'Un Concerto Brandebourgeois de J.-S. Bach ne signifie rien et n'exprime rien qu'on puisse analyser avec des mots' ('A Brandenburg Concerto by J. S. Bach signifies nothing and expresses nothing that can be analysed in words') (404). This statement demonstrates the survival (or the rebirth?) of the principle of 'absolute music' whose rationale and whose birth in the nineteenth century have been so well described by Daniel Chua in *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). On the one hand, Dada certainly highlighted the intellectual shakiness of the concept of absolute music; on the other hand, it seems to have done no lasting damage to that concept, even in the mind of the most musical of the core Dadaists.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

humour has been variously interpreted as a smoke-screen for his own technical inadequacies, a Dadaist anti-Art gesture, the practical jokery of an incorrigible fummiste, or a means of maintaining a stance of ironic detachment from the spiritual crises of his time.

There may be some truth in all of these, but they [*sic*] only partial explanations of an art in which sense and nonsense, seriousness and humour, mystery and mystification co-exist.<sup>33</sup>

Quite so; and Satie maintains this co-existence by the method first developed for the EMAJC. That method consists of three parallel operations, three arguments that must be conducted simultaneously. It is their simultaneity that lends Satie's style its peculiar air of impenetrability.

The first of these three operations is an assertion of absolute value that is not supported by any rational argument. An unreasoned affirmation of authority coupled with an evocation of immortality are the keys to this assertion. Thus the Parcier of the EMAJC attributes to himself an absolute authority over the Church, and speaks in the name of the Eternal; similarly, Erik Satie takes for himself the right to say who is a great composer and who is not, and to grant immortality to his chosen ones.

The second of the three parallel operations is an undermining of the authority that is affirmed in the first operation. This undermining is quite simply conducted by irony; Satie shows, through ironic conformism, that anyone who takes such authority seriously is ridiculous (and that includes Satie himself). It is this operation that brings Satie close to Dada.

And the third operation, the least visible but the most important, is an indirect and empirical demonstration that we believe in the absolute value affirmed in the first operation; we believe in spite of the irrational and ridiculous nature of that belief proved in the second operation.

In short: the affirmation of absolute value; proof that it is ridiculous to believe in absolute value; and finally, a demonstration that, ridiculous though it is, we, like Satie, believe.

I do not have the space to develop the analogy here, but the closest parallel to this aesthetic of the irrational absolute known to me is Mallarmé's. Many critics, the most thorough of them being Bertrand Marchal in *La Religion de Mallarmé*,<sup>34</sup> exploring the geography of Mallarmé's idealism, have shown how, using, like Satie, religion as a model or metaphor, Mallarmé situates the artist's ideal beyond the rational, beyond accessibility to scientific proof. He justifies belief in it only empirically, by demonstrating that audience behaviour always implies that we do in fact believe. For Mallarmé as for Satie, the primary evidence for the immortality of art is to be found in our response to it. We receive art as immortal; therefore, it must be taken as immortal. The irrationality of this belief is not a reason to refuse it; it is a reason to limit the dominion of the rational. Where Satie differs from Mallarmé is in the force of his determination to attack those who would extend that dominion: the critics, the 'pions', the pedagogues.

How does the concept of truth fare in these operations? Music, to the former Parcier of the EMAJC, remains true in the same way that religion is true. Any attempt (unless it be ironic) to assert or impose its truth leads straight into the trap of inquisition, which plays into the hands of its enemies, the critics and pontiffs. But to deny that we receive music as truth is cutting off one's nose to spite one's

<sup>33</sup> Whittington, 'Serious Immobilities'.

<sup>34</sup> Bertrand Marchal, *La Religion de Mallarmé* (Paris: Corti, 1988).

face. If I may rehearse the paradox one last time: Dada is quite right to tell us that there is no Truth in Art. Yet it is obvious that in practice, we all (including Satie) believe in the truth of Beethoven just as firmly (and just as unjustifiably, and for the same reasons) as we believe in Beethoven's individuality; and this belief in an individual truth is inseparable, in the end, from a more obscure but undeniable faith in the individuality of music, and in a certain kind of 'truth' in art (if I may borrow Satie's scare quotes) ... . The only way forward, for Erik Satie, is to play one's faith in music against one's awareness of the problematic nature of that faith. The result, according to the stage of the game, can be vexatious, self-destructive, distressingly ironic, satisfyingly comic, or serenely beautiful. My hope, as I continue my research on Satie, is that I will be able to show how his music passes through these five stages; and to explain how his words propel his music, and seem able to accompany it through all of those stages – even, perhaps, the last.